# San Antonio Missions

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## Mission San Jose

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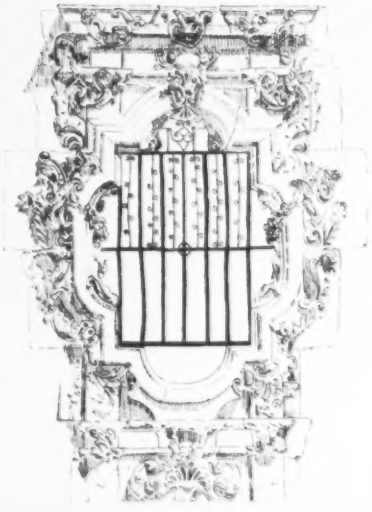
## ROSA'S WINDOW

Noted for its beautiful ornamentation, Rosa's Window was used for religious instruction. On the feast day of Santa Rosa de Lima, a priest would conduct a special mass from this church sacristy window. The flowers and fruits of the pomegranite carved around the window represented the story of original sin to mission residents. Others regard the carvings as roses, giving the name "Rose Window." Some historians trace the window to master mason Antonio Salazar, whose name appears on mission registers during the church construction period. Others attribute the window to Pedro



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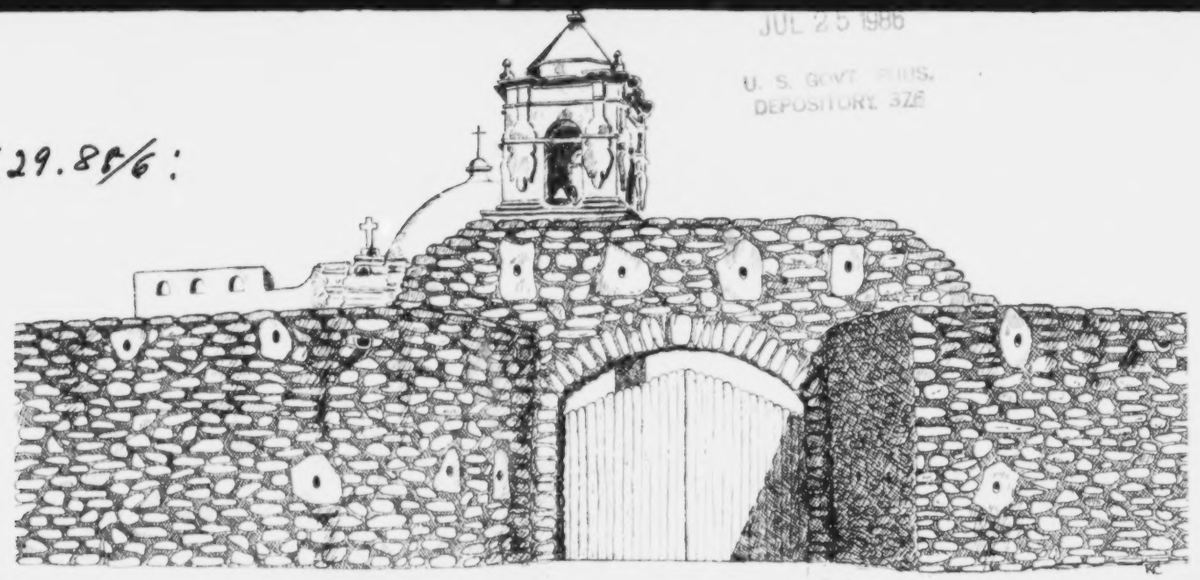

## "QUEEN OF THE MISSIONS"

Some say Mission San José was the most beautiful mission in Texas. In 1720 Franciscan Father Antonio Margil de Jesús left war conditions on the East Texas frontier to return here, to establish Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo. A main goal of the mission was to transform the Indians into responsible Spanish Catholic citizens. In addition, its strategic location was to help defend Spain's northern frontier against the French, the Lipan Apache and the Comanche Indians. The Spanish mission system helped both Church and State.

## THE MISSION BEGINS

Fr. Margil's first concern that winter of 1720 was shelter. Early structures were jacales, made of sticks and mud. There were problems, a flood and once an epidemic, and the mission moved several times before settling here in 1739.

The Indians near here were nomadic Coahuiltecans ("Kwa-weel-tekens"). Threatened by hostile tribes and promised food and shelter, they gathered to the mission. Two or three soldiers were here, to train the Indians to defend the mission. Acculturated Indians from older missions came to act as interpreters, teachers and good examples. Sometimes governors visited San José. Their reports today are valuable history.

The first permanent structure, the granary, was begun in 1740. The Indians learned stone-cutting and brick-making. They learned building techniques, such as using scaffolding. One of the most important new skills was farming. Hand-dug acequias (irrigation ditches) brought water to the labores (farm fields). Indians learned to grow crops instead of gathering wild plants. They cultivated herbs along the acequias, which also supplied fish. A flour mill was in operation by 1794.

## THE MISSION AND SELF-PROTECTION

One function of the mission was protection, for this was still a frontier. The compound was a fortress, with high, thick walls. Parapeted roofs served as ramparts, and the corner bastions held cannons. Indian blacksmiths made items for defense. The Indians learned European warfare, including using guns. There was an armory, and sometimes the mission cemetery was a drilling ground. Sentinels kept watch, both afoot and horseback. The bell tower made a fine lookout. If there was a threat, the gates could be quickly shut and the bastions and loopholes manned. Historical reports do not reveal any major attack on Mission San José, but outside its walls hostiles sometimes preyed on goods and cattle being brought in.

READEX FICHE

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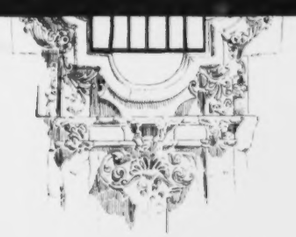
"Rose Window." Some historians trace the window to master mason Antonio Salazar, whose name appears on mission registers during the church construction period. Others attribute the window to Pedro Huizar. Many legends persist of his carving the window in memory of his lost love, Rosa.



## LEARNING NEW WAYS

Thirty miles south, several thousand cattle grazed in the sun at El Atascoso, the mission ranch. The headquarters was built like a small fortress, although livestock grazed on open range. Coahuiltecans learned to run the ranch alone, becoming shepherds, vaqueros, butchers, and tanners. They learned the miracle of horses, bringing mobility only dreamed about before. Wool and cotton also changed the Coahuiltecans' way of life. In a workshop now seen as ruins they learned carding, spinning, weaving, and tailoring. Society changed. Spanish songs and dances led by European instruments appeared alongside the Indians' mitotes, a type of ceremony. Around 1768 San Jose was at its height, with over 350 residents. The Indians' lives had changed . . . and so had the mission.

## THE 1800s DECLINE

Change. Some Indians moved outside the mission walls, and others returned to nomadic life. European diseases weakened the population. Administrations changed. The Spanish government needed to economize, and decided the missions were expendable. When a general decided that all unbranded cattle belonged to the Crown, an important financial resource was crushed. In 1794 an alcalde (mayor) was appointed to care for civil affairs, and the farmlands began to be distributed to the 78 remaining mission Indians. The last friar, Fr. de León, left in 1824.

Visitors came and went throughout the 1800s. The compound still provided shelter for a few families, although stones were carted away for the growing town of San Antonio. Troops stayed at the site, and damage to statues from target practice was noted in 1850. Despite this the religious heart of Mission San José was not forgotten. Benedictine monks established a priory here in 1859 and worked for nine years, replacing many Roman arches with pointed Gothic ones. The dome and a wall collapsed. Still, Holy Cross Fathers of Notre Dame held services until 1888. Redemptorists also served at San José (1923-31). In 1931 the Franciscans returned, and built the friary outside the northeast corner.

## RESTORATION AND RENEWAL

Gradually, concerned people began to restore Mission San José. In 1917 funds were raised to preserve both the convento and the church. The granary was restored by the San Antonio Conservation Society. Donated funds and labor came from many sources, including the Works Progress Administration. Most of today's compound was rebuilt. Specialists recarved the wooden church doors and repaired intricate stonework. In 1937 the church was rededicated.

Mission San José became a Texas state park in 1941, and was such until 1978 when it became part of San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. Today many San Antonio residents are descendants of the Coahuiltecans, and of the Spaniards, who gathered around this mission. In architecture, food, language, religion, and many other ways, we reflect the people who built Mission San José.

Jill L. Campbell, Park Ranger

For a Safe, More Enjoyable Visit

* Be careful of uneven or slippery walkways, ramps, and steps.
* Prevent injury and damage, do not climb on fragile mission structures.
* For security, LOCK YOUR CAR. Put valuables out of sight.
* All artifacts, plants, stones, and wildlife are protected by law. Do not take or injure them.

All donations to the San Antonio Mission National Historical Park are greatly appreciated as they will help in the preservation of the missions. All donations are tax deductible and a tax form will be provided upon request.

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